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SUBJECT: NINEWA: "CIVIL WAR IS NOT ON THE AGENDA"

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REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

11. (C) Since the bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samarra on February 22, we have asked contacts if they believe civil war is imminent. Several point to areas with high populations of Shia, such as Tal Afar, as ripe for civil war once Coalition Forces are drawn down. Actual incidents range from threat letters, kidnappings for ransom, and random killings targeted at certain groups (such as a widely reported March 16 incident where six Turkoman Shia university students on a school bus were executed, while Sunnis on riding with them were set free by the killers). We interviewed political party, Iraqi government and security officials to gauge their opinions and insight into this issue. Our conclusion: in Ninewa, there's heightened tension, but mudslinging as usual. End Summary and Comment.

SUNNI VIEWS: IT'S THE IRANIANS

12. (C) Sunni Arabs denied there was any evidence of civil war in the province. Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) spokesman Younis Hashim said he believed relations between the varying political parties had actually improved over the past few months. There had been fewer incidences of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), for example, but he did claim the number of kidnappings and assassinations had risen. National assembly delegate and Iraqi National Dialogue Council (INDC) member Mahmood Al Azzawi shifted blame for local tensions on "Coalition Forces." He claimed they had been "working with the press" to foster stories of violence in Baghdad and southern Iraq that was contributing to local tensions. Other than that, he said, the security condition in Mosul was "very good." Both Hashim and Al Azzawi pointedly accused Iran and Syria for creating problems in the country, especially among Shia. "The Shia are under the influence of Iran," said Al Azzawi, "and that is the source of all of these problems."

KURDISH OPINION: IT'S THE SUNNIS

13. (C) The Kurds, on the other hand, said Sunni Arabs were increasing ethnic tensions. Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) spokesman Sheikh Mohayadeen Ma'roof accused IIP of infiltrating local NGOs to ally them with "Islamic parties." There was an overall sense of unease, he said, with increased kidnappings, attacks, and killings of Kurds by "Arabs," which was forcing hundreds of Kurdish families to flee to relative security in Iraqi Kurdistan. Ma'roof believed there were "signs of civil war" between Sunnis and Shia, and that the real cause of problems in the country was with the "Iranians" and "Baathists."

Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) member Mehdi Herki claimed an increase in killings and assassinations targeting Kurds, then Assyrians, Yezidis, and some Arabs were a result of terrorists moving to Mosul from Samarra and Baghdad. He said the recent killing of Turkoman Shia students on a school bus last week occurred because of the students' identities. Herki believed the impetus for the attack was to "ignite sectarian conflict amongst the people of Ninewa." Omer Azzo of the PUK concurred claiming the level of violence had risen substantially over the past few months. Kurds were targeted in Mosul because of their "close connection" to Coalition Forces (CF). He said many threats received by Kurds were made by "Baathists and Islamists." Azzo believed that violence in Ninewa was in direct relation to the formation of the new Iraqi government. Terrorists did not want the government to function, he said.

MINORITY OBSERVATIONS: IT'S EVERYONE BUT US

14. (C) Minority group opinions varied considerably. Shabek Shia claimed there was "no sign" of tensions between Sunni and Shia, mostly due to the small number of Shia in Ninewa. Yousef Muharam of Shabek Democratic Assembly (SDA) claimed, however, that tensions in Tal Afar, where there were considerable numbers of Shia, were a different story. Muharam said tensions there between Sunni and Shia have caused several Shia to leave the area for refuge in southern Iraq. Dr. Haneen Al Qado, national assembly delegate and SDA leader, disagreed with his colleague,

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believing that Shia Shabek and Turkoman settling in Mosul were "increasingly becoming targets" of terrorists who were bent on waging sectarian strife on them. Aref Yousef of Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution of Iraq (SCIRI) had a different take on the situation in Mosul. The left bank of Mosul -- mostly Arab side -- was becoming tense. Over the past four days, he said, 20 people were killed, including a doctor. He claimed the most pronounced problems between Sunnis and Shia were in Tal Afar and Al Baaj in the southwestern part of the province. However, the situation in those areas had improved after visits by provincial government leaders, he said.

15. (C) Christians had a very different take on the situation. While noting an increase of kidnappings and murders, they claimed that civil war in Ninewa, specifically Mosul, was "highly unlikely." Dinkha Patros of Beth Nahrain Patriotic Union said although there was some tension in the city, the markets were still functioning and people were walking on the streets. "But the situation was worse a month ago," he said. He claimed security in the western part of the city had improved since CF had shifted more security operations to Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). "Still there are people leaving the city, and even my own family is resettling to Dohuk," said Patros. While there might be civil war in southern Iraq and Baghdad, claimed Edmon Yohanna of Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM), there would never be war throughout the whole country. Yohanna believed the Badr and Mehdi militias were the "main forces" behind ethnic tensions in the south. He, too, related problems with security in the whole country to government formation in Baghdad. "The Sunnis want to make a point that the Ministries of Interior and Defense will never be Shiite," he said. Yohanna claimed any "war" going on in Ninewa was a different kind of war. He said the root of the problems in Mosul was a "weak" provincial government dominated by the Kurds. Yohanna credited any stability in Mosul to "Arabic forces" of the ISF, since the

Kurds "don't care about security" in non-Kurdish areas.

SECURITY FORCES ANALYSIS: IT'S THE GOVERNMENT

¶6. (C) Members of the Provincial Joint Coordination Center (PJCC) believed tensions were rising but security incidents were not (the number of murders stayed the same at about 30 per month, they said). Col Ismael Hussein Khader, an Iraqi Army (IA) 2nd Division liaison officer at the PJCC, claimed security problems were escalating, which was due to corruption at the mid and upper levels of the ISF. He and PJCC colleague Col Khaled Suleyman, also a liaison officer with the IA 2nd Division, believed that "too many terrorists" were freed from prisons by CF, ISF, and judges (septel). They did not believe the cause of the violence was due to civil strife or ethnic tensions, but rather to a criminal justice system that was not working. Khader claimed that each time a "terrorist" was set free the public's trust in the government fell even lower. He and Suleyman also claimed that the number of terrorists reported by CF and ISF was false; instead of numbering in the hundreds terrorists were somewhere in the thousands. They failed to understand how CF and ISF could not be winning the war unless the number of terrorists was much higher. In Tal Afar, Khader claimed that terrorists, not necessarily ethnicities, were behind problems there. He said the city "would fall" once CF was drawn down. Khader and Suleyman believed that kidnappings and extortions in Ninewa were a result of terrorist financing to support insurgent operations. They blamed "death squads" in the south for causing troubles there, and the "Kurds" for contributing to problems in the north. Chief Judge Faisal Hadeed claimed there was "no civil war" brewing in Mosul. There were simply "groups" spreading fear and propaganda to frighten the public, he said. He believed any problems now would "stop" in the near future.

COMMENT: "NOT ON THE AGENDA"

¶7. (C) Ninewa's Kurds and Shia believe that they are being specifically targeted because of their ethnicity. The Christians, on the other hand, have a more cynical view of the whole situation. They appear to believe there is no civil war brewing, but rather a concerted and continuous effort to push them out of the province. We conclude that each group is choosing to confirm its existing prejudices. In the meantime, we should be mindful of these events but hope that as PUK national assembly delegate Abdelbari Al Zebari told us earlier, "Civil war is not on the agenda."

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